

COVID-19 Tests Frequently Asked Questions



Misinformation about COVID-19 is being shared across social media and other platforms at an alarming speed. Making decisions based on facts is the best way to help yourself stay safe and healthy. We provide answers to common questions about the spread of the virus, prevention efforts, treatment options, and potential cures.

Is COVID-19 just like the flu?

COVID-19 and the flu are different illnesses that have a lot of similarities. They have similar symptoms, can range from mild to severe, and spread from person to person. The flu is serious and is responsible for about 12,000 to 61,000 deaths per year.

However, COVID-19 is particularly concerning because it is a new virus, meaning that people do not have immunity to it, and a vaccine might be months or even years away. The mortality rate (how many people will die per year) is thought to be deadlier than the flu, as well as easier to spread from person to person.

Why should I trust the information being offered in my community around COVID-19?

Staying informed and prepared can be overwhelming. It is also common to feel fear or distrust of healthcare providers, especially when available information and services are changing as quickly as they are with COVID-19. Public health agencies in our region want to keep all communities safe and are offering reliable testing, up-to-date information, and connections to care regardless of a person's insurance status, race, income, age, religion, criminal history, or immigration status.

Is testing for COVID-19 really available and reliable?

There is a national shortage of COVID-19 tests, but Richmond City and Henrico Health Districts are working to make more tests available to all residents. We are partnering with primary care providers, testing laboratories, and safety net providers to connect people to testing. Also, we are holding public testing events for people who want testing but do not have access to insurance or a healthcare provider.

- If you have symptoms, call your primary care provider if you have one. Even if you have called before without success, testing may now be available.
- If you do not have a primary care provider, call the Coronavirus Hotline at 804-205-3501 to connect with a provider who offers COVID-19 testing or register for a COVID-19 testing event.

Can I trust the free testing events happening in my community?

It is not uncommon to feel fear or distrust of receiving healthcare services. Historically, the healthcare industry has exploited and maltreated African American/Black and other marginalized communities.

This generational trauma, along with present-day experiences of discrimination in healthcare settings, has lasting impacts in our communities and is important to recognize. But COVID-19 tests being offered in low-income Black and Brown communities are reliable, safe, and used only for the purpose of identifying positive cases and helping to prevent outbreaks.

Have they identified a cure or vaccine for COVID-19?

There is not currently an FDA-approved vaccine or treatment for COVID-19. However, there are things we can do to treat the symptoms and prevent spreading COVID-19 to others. We can wear masks, stay six feet away from others, wash our hands, and only leave the house for necessary trips like going to the grocery store or work.

If you get sick, the best thing to do is stay home and rest, closely monitor your symptoms, and seek medical advice by calling your primary care provider or urgent care facility. Most people experience mild symptoms from COVID-19 and will recover at home.

Is wearing a mask or face covering enough to protect me from COVID-19?

Wearing a clean cloth mask in public can help slow the spread of COVID-19, but it is also necessary to keep at least six feet of distance from other people, wash your hands frequently, and leave the house only for necessary trips like the grocery store or work. You should also wash your hands before you put on your mask, before you adjust it, and after you take it off.

If there is no cure for COVID-19 and most cases are mild, why does getting tested matter?

While most cases are mild, severe illness from COVID-19 does occur, especially among older adults and people with serious underlying conditions, but sometimes with healthy younger people as well. Many people who have a fever, cough, or shortness of breath choose to get tested or are recommended to get tested by their doctors.

If we can confirm that we have COVID-19, we can make temporary changes, so we do not spread it to our families, neighbors, and friends. Although getting tested is often recommended by public health experts and doctors, it is a personal choice and is not mandatory.

Is testing for COVID-19 painful and will the results take a long time?

To test for COVID-19, a clinician will insert a 6-inch cotton swab deep into the nose for 5 seconds in each nostril and rotate it a few times. This collects material from the cavity between the nose and the mouth.

Some people say the process causes only mild discomfort while others find it more painful; however, it is over quickly, and it is very rare to experience any soreness or pain after the collection is finished. The sample is then sent to a laboratory and results are shared in 3-5 days.

How can I trust the way COVID-19 is being handled when it creates so many new challenges for me and my family?

Social distancing and other prevention efforts are saving lives, but they are also disrupting daily life and creating anxiety, grief, sadness, and anger for many of us. None of us have experienced this situation before, and many people are dealing with loss of income, mental health challenges, and trouble meeting basic needs.

- If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings, call the Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746.
- To connect with local resources for food, housing, income loss, and more, visit RVAStrong.org or call 311.

